



**Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Southern District of Texas**

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JUDGE SENTENCES COUPLE THAT SMUGGLED 12-HOUR OLD INFANT

McALLEN, TX – Late Wednesday afternoon, United States District Judge Randy Crane sentenced a Donna, Texas, couple for smuggling a newborn child into the United States. Margaret Lynn Vela, 39, was sentenced to four (4) years probation, and her husband, Jose Jesus Vela, Jr., 40, to six (6) months in federal custody. In April 2005, the couple was convicted by a jury's verdict of conspiracy to transport an alien and with transporting an alien within the United States.

During the one-day trial, the jury heard evidence proving that on November 14, 2005, Margaret Vela and her husband, Jesus Vela, Jr., accompanied by a newborn child, entered the United States from Mexico at the Pharr, Texas, Port of Entry. During primary inspection, Mrs. Vela, the driver of the vehicle, told the inspector that the female child was hers and had been at the Rio Grande Regional Hospital in McAllen, Texas. At secondary inspection, unable to produce any documents showing that the child was a United States citizen, Mr. and Mrs. Vela admitted to smuggling the child into the United States because they could not conceive a child of their own.

The jury learned that the couple met with the mother of the soon-to-be born child on November 13, 2005, in Reynosa, Mexico. Early the following day, on November 14, 2005, while at home in Donna, Texas, the couple received a call advising them that the mother had gone into labor. After withdrawing money from their bank, the Velas drove to Reynosa, Mexico, paid the clinic for the delivery of the child and for the mother's medications, then brought the 12-hour old infant across the border into the United States at the Pharr, Texas, Port of Entry, representing the child as their own.

The infant was turned over to the Mexican consulate and returned to its country of birth.

This matter was investigated by agents of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection and was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Anibal J. Alaniz.

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